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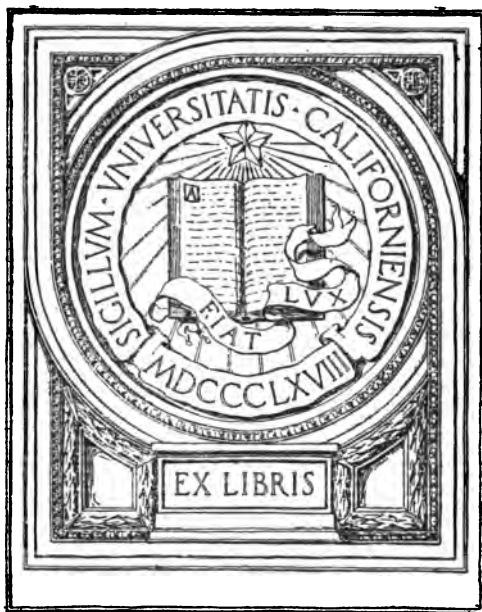
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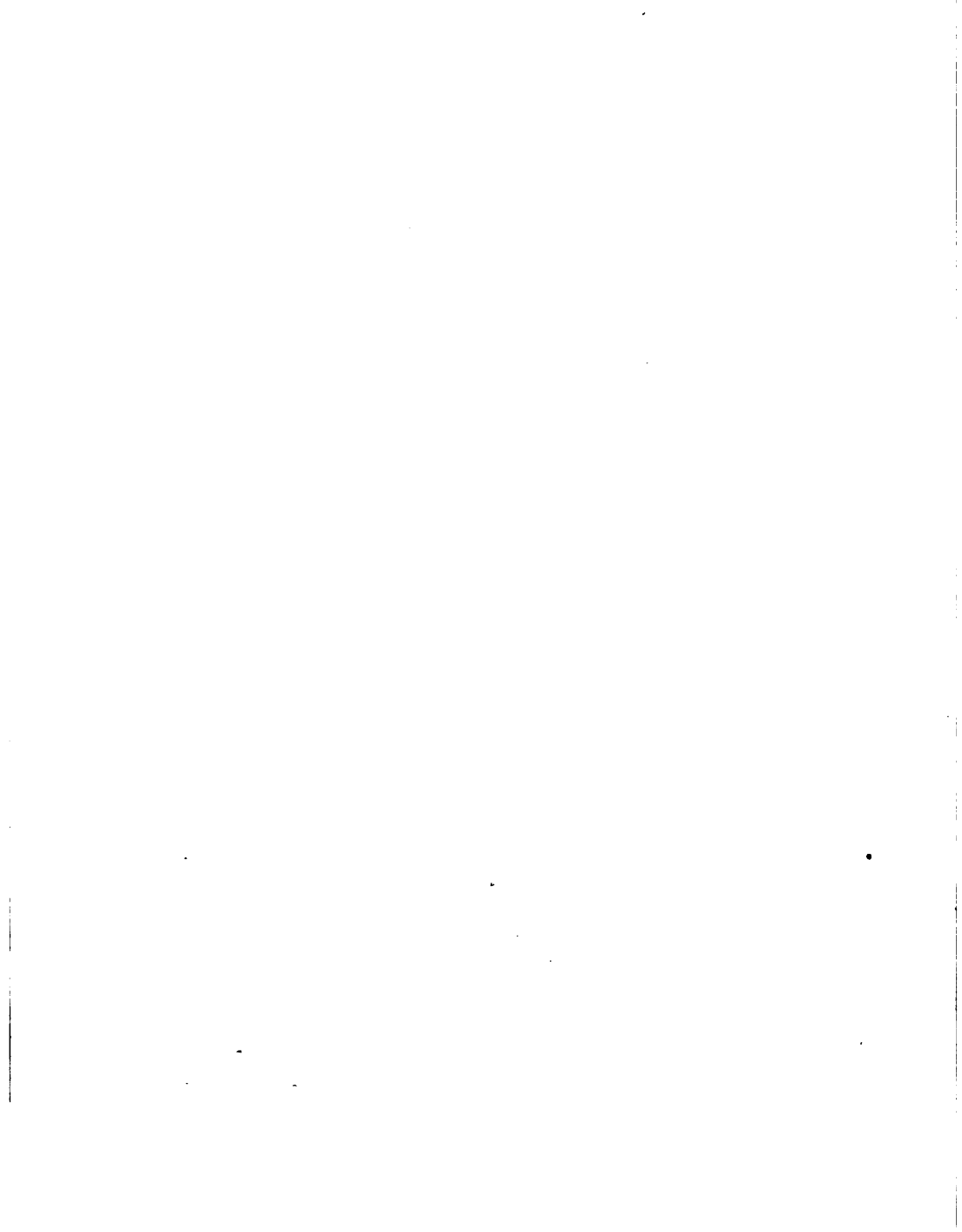
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Attila, My Attila!

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

ATTILA, MY ATTILA!

A PLAY BY MICHAEL FIELD



LONDON: ELKIN MATHEWS

1896

To YNU
Alumni

Eng Alumni

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P R E F A C E

TRAGEDY is the conflict of man with the indifference of nature. For all forces of life sweep on their regenerating way, and disregard obstruction or break it down ; yet mortals strive presumptuously to withstand this impetus, and to subject it to their own thought and need. Then there is a death-struggle, and the human combatant disappears, sometimes recognising his schism, sometimes unconscious of it to the end.

Our interest in each case is due to the very vitality that a man turns against life when he fights it in vain with its own weapon, as Prometheus fought Zeus, as Satan fought Jehovah, as Lear withstood Cordelia, and Hedda Gabler her own motherhood. What indeed is necessity but the unfaltering energy of existence to which even the strongest and most rebellious of living creatures must bow, so that the triumph of life, and not the triumph of death, becomes the proper subject of all tragedy.

When, in spite of his overthrow, a sinner repents, and in his contrition worships the power he has with-

PREFACE

stood in its own might, then his tragedy has tonic virtue. If, on the contrary, he remain impenitent and blind, his fate prostrates us with terror: yet since there are such tragedies it is well sometimes to face them, and learn how they came to be so desolate, and why the sorrow in them has no life.

Little Honoria, whose yielding "to the impulse of nature" Gibbon chronicles with such sympathy—a sympathy pregnant with the feelings of our age that was to follow—sought to give freedom to her womanhood by unwomanly audacities; and although the importunate desire *to be herself* was fair and natural, its perversion was revenged by the blight with which nature curses.

To be vitally stirred, yet go blindly on the way of death; to be urged by nature, and yet outrage her through very obedience is a tragedy of tragedies, and one not remote; for Honoria is the *New Woman* of the fifth century: and to any who shall read her story in these pages the author says, as clearly as a certain Prologue when it declared—

"This man with lantern, dog, and bush of thorn,
Presenteth Moonshine"

that this play presents Irony.

M. F.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

VALENTINIAN III	Emperor of the West
THEODOSIUS II	Emperor of the East
SATYRUS	{ An Armenian, Chamberlain to Galla Placidia
EUGENIUS	{ A young Chamberlain of the Palace, waiting on Honoria
ANTHEMIUS	{ A young Roman of Consular rank
GALLA PLACIDIA	{ Empress of the West, Valen- tinian's Mother
HONORIA	Valentinian's only Sister
PULCHERIA	{ Empress of the East, Theo- dosius' eldest Sister
ARCADIA MARINA	} His younger Sisters
ATHENAIS	{ A Greek Girl under Pulcheria's protection
MARSA	Anthemius' Wife
A Priest, Chamberlains, Courtiers, Women, Slaves, Soldiers of the Guard	

SCENE—IN ACTS I, II AND IV, AT *Ravenna*
IN ACT III AT *Byzantium*



ACT I

ATTILA, MY ATTILA!

ACT I

SCENE—*A room of state in the palace at Ravenna, opening through a colonnade on to a terrace with a distant view of the harbour.*

EUGENIUS *is walking up and down the terrace: he stops under the boughs of a pomegranate and picks up a bracelet from the ground. In the room itself slaves, some fair Goths, some Africans, are spreading carpets, putting up hangings, and wreathing the columns.*

SATYRUS *enters with more slaves, who are bringing in tripods; he points out where they are to place them, then fixes his eyes on Eugenius.*

Satyrus The dog, I loathe him!—fingering some toy
He means to give the princess. Insolence
For him to note her birthday!

(*Going up to Eugenius*) Chamberlain,
Some gift you would present?

Attila, My Attila !

Eugenius That's my affair.

Satyrus Indeed ! But you mistake : nothing that touches

My princess. . . .

Eugenius Mine—Honorio.

Satyrus I say nothing

Touching the honour of my Empress' daughter
Has ever been indifferent to me.

Eugenius (*Shrugging his shoulders*) She has her preferences, and does not choose
Her mother's chamberlain for confidant.

Satyrus (*To a Gothic lad*) Slave, there must be fresh
garlands ; wreath those pillars.

(*In the same voice to Eugenius*) Give me that bracelet !

Eugenius Shall we come to blows !

You fool, you think I do not know my place !

This is the princess' bracelet ; I am waiting

To give it back to her : that privilege

Surely belongs to me, her chamberlain.

I must reprove her for her carelessness

In leaving it about.

(*He holds it up provokingly before Satyrus*)

Satyrus (*Sharply*) You know the news ?

Eugenius Why naturally there is nothing you
Can tell me, holding office similar

To mine, except some tattle of the court.

Satyrus I beg your pardon, I am higher up
The scale than you—Placidia's officer,

Attila, My Attila !

And able therefore to announce her pleasure
To you as to the court.

*(Close to him and speaking so that the slaves do
not hear)*

Our pretty princess
To-day is made Augusta.

Eugenius What a farce !

Satyrus Her mother is in earnest, and commands
The servants to remember that this title
Removes the princess from all intimate
Connection with them. Do not use reproof.
Why, you have dropped the bangle.

(He moves down the room) Fritigern—
Now Pluto catch you, rascal !

(He buffets a slave-boy who has knocked over a tripod)

Eugenius Were she dead
I should be nearer to her !

Satyrus (Coming up to him again) Chamberlain,
I must instruct you : absolute prostration,
You know, before Augusta.

Eugenius (Between his teeth) Damn your eyes !

Satyrus You never must address her ; but in silence,
And with your lids kept on the ground . . .

(Enter HONORIA, dressed very simply in white ;

*Eugenius looks up at her with a flash of
admiration)*

Honoria Dear hearts,
How grave you look, some point of etiquette

Attila, My Attila!

Knitting your brows! On whom will you confer
The place of honour at my feast to-night?
Meanwhile I am sixteen.

Satyrus And such a beauty,
Venus is doubtless pouting. (*To Eugenius*) Chamberlain,
Our blessed princess should have kept her room
Till summoned by her mother to receive
The state's congratulations on her birthday.

Honorio But no one greeted me. I sat alone
So long; and then I heard the slaves at work
Unrolling the big tapestries—the bustle
Of steps attracted me, and here I am!
Now set me on that throne and talk to me.
Eugenius, help!

Satyrus (*Pushing him back*) Eugenius must attend
To these instructions.

(*He holds out a roll of parchment. EUGENIUS impatiently takes and reads it as he goes out. One by one the slaves leave, having finished their preparations*)

You must be content,
My sweet chick of an empress, with my homage,
Just for the present; more will follow soon—
The perfect homage of the stiffened back
And lowered eye and more than stiffened tongue.

Honorio O Satyrus, but that is very sad:
I hate formalities so much—the banquet,
The stupid faces, all those serious men,

Attila, My Attila !

Who might cheer death a little if his guests,
But do not interest me. How sweet a silk
They have hung up to canopy that chair !

Satyrus Your chair.

Honorio Then I am glad I am sixteen.

Satyrus But hear my counsel : you must be demure
Now you are growing older.

Honorio How delicious

When growing older means that every day
One is a little nearer to one's youth ;
A little nearer—oh, I can be solemn !—
A little nearer to the grave, but then
What grave ? The grave of one's own wretched child-
hood,

With all the pedagogues and punishments
That make it hateful. Who would be a child ?
The only honest thing that children do
Is to cry out with rage when they are whipt ;
They never wander where they have a mind,
They never eat or drink what they are fond of,
And they are always hearing of their faults.
It is so doleful.

Satyrus, what right
Had you to send Eugenius away ?
He is my chamberlain.

Satyrus (*Not heeding*) Princess, your mother
Is planning for you on this festival
An unexpected pleasure.

Attila, My Attila !

Honorio Scarcely that—

No pleasure that a parent plans can be
An unexpected pleasure, for one knows
So well beforehand what they think will please :
A solid benefit, an empty honour,
More purses in the treasury, but nothing,
Nothing to spend to-day the way we like.
And then my mother is so dismal.

Satyrus (*In an alarmed whisper*) Hush,
She enters with her train.

(*GALLA PLACIDIA advances, escorted by several mutes
and other attendants. HONORIO receives her
mother with the deepest reverence, remaining
prostrate till she is on the throne*)

Placidia But how is this,
That you are here, unsummoned? *Satyrus*—
And on this day! It is a grave offence.

Honorio Mother, it was no fault of his.

Placidia (*To Satyrus*) Dismissal
Will follow on a second breach of rule.
An eunuch, and not versed in etiquette—
What else is there to interest you?

Satyrus So much!
Empress, your sorrows and your cares.

Placidia Well said!
I was unjust. *Honorio*, you are weeping,
And why, you foolish girl?

Honorio It is my birthday,

Attila, My Attila !

And, mother, I am waiting for a kiss.

Placidia (To Satyrus and the others) Withdraw a little !

*(They go into the corridors at the side of the room and
Satyrus waits by the door of the audience-chamber
to the right)*

Now embrace me, child !

Honorio I cannot. I should wet your robes with tears.

Let me go back into my room again ;

I have displeased you.

Placidia Do not be so headstrong !

Come here, Honorio ; you are now sixteen,

And I must talk with you.

Honorio No, do not, mother !

But there is something that I really want

To talk with you about, if you will listen . . .

(Twisting her fingers)

For just a little while. I am too frightened

To speak of it to Marsa.

Placidia Well, what is it ?

Honorio I cannot even tell you . . . I am happy,

Yet so intensely wretched. Is it wrong

To feel like this ?

Placidia Quite proper to reserve

This confidence for me.

Honorio (In a low, eager voice) Then tell me all !

It seems some god that I am worshipping,

And do not know his name. Night after night

I have been like Europa on the sea

Attila, My Attila!

In spray and storm and utter loneliness,
Save for the sense that I was borne along
Riding in perfect safety—and the peril
Was so delicious, for I steered my course
Right through the waves. Mother, in every dream
It was the same.

Placidia What pagan fancies—hush!
Your nurse must be reproved for telling tales
Like this one of Europa. I can see
You have been too much with inferiors—
They are not to be trusted. From to-day
You will be my companion.

Honorio (*In a high voice*) Everywhere?

Placidia Child, do not shriek like that—your father's
habit,

But very vulgar.

Honorio (*Irritably*) If he did not please you,
Why did you choose my father?

Placidia You suppose
That in my second marriage I had choice?
My childless brother gave me to Constantius,
His Roman general—and I have lived
As women must to please my family.

Honorio And not to please yourself? Yet nurse declares
When you were taken prisoner by the Goths
In girlhood, you had lovers—two at once.
I want to be a captive and have lovers,
Two at a time, and freely choose at last

Attila, My Attila !

The great, barbaric fellow as you chose.

Adolphus was a hero !

Placidia He was king

Before I would consent to marry him,

King of the Goths . . . and yet I will not feign,

I loved him, loved him dearly.

Honorio (*Caressing her mother*) I forgive

Your coldness to my father.

Placidia (*Smiling, as she returns Honorio's caress*)

A romance

Holds you at once ! But did you hear the end ?

I would not speak of it except to save

My daughter from the folly of desiring

A captive's miseries. My hero fell

At Barcelona by a traitor's hands ;

I was once more a prisoner, but this time

I was not wooed or flattered, I was set

To march on foot twelve miles before the horse

Of the assassin. All you know of me

Dates from that day.

Honorio (*More passionately caressing her*) O mother,

this is cruel,

And I so pity you . . .

Placidia (*Holding Honorio's hand and looking out fixedly*)

I had a son

By that first marriage. I have let the past

Be past ; but in his little, silver coffin

My life is buried. Do not speak to me,

Attila, My Attila !

But keep my hands, I like to feel your fingers—
How soft !

You see, there must not be romance,
Child, in your life.

Honorio I do not see it so.

Placidia I want to save you from how many things
That I have borne, that I would rather die
Than bear again.

Honorio But let me bear them once !

Placidia I would prolong your youth and . . .
(*Enter Valentinian*)

Honorio Valentinian,
Stolen from his tutor ! Why, how sweet of him !

Placidia But very premature. Congratulations
Must not be offered yet.

Honorio Brother and sister
Must have one kiss. (*She embraces him*)

Placidia (*To Honorio*) There is a great surprise
In preparation for you ; such an honour
As you are scarcely fitted to receive—
At least in this poor raiment—that you could not
Have dreamed, it is so wonderful.

Honorio (*Shaking her head*) Oh, nothing
Can be more wonderful than what I dream.
Val, are you in the secret ?

Valentinian In the plot—
Whew ! I could tell you . . .

Placidia (*Angrily*) Valentinian !

Attila, My Attila !

(*In a peremptory tone to Honoria*) Dress !
Marsa has full instructions. Keep your room
Until I summon you.

Honoria (*Going*) What can it be ?

(*She leaves the room, Satyrus lifting the curtain for
her to pass*)

Placidia Now, Valentinian, you must understand
The meaning of my action of to-day,
And not defeat it foolishly. I live,
As you must, for the glory of our house,
The Theodosian House : Honoria too
Must live for it. Think of the great example
Her cousin gives her in Byzantium !
Pulcheria, the Augusta, keeps herself
A virgin that her brother may continue
Sole emperor in the East, as in the West
It is my will you should be sole Augustus.
A son-in-law shall never share your throne ;
Yet no one less than emperor may espouse
The daughter of our sacred family.

Valentinian A proud distinction !

Placidia She must think it is,
And will, if you are wise.

(*To Satyrus, who approaches at a sign from his mistress*)

O Satyrus,
Is she not looking pretty ? All my life
I have been planning how to give her pleasure ;
But she is like her father. When I stooped

Attila, My Attila !

To give Constantius the imperial title
He held it sixteen months, and all that time . . .

Satyrus Yes, madam, he kept falling off to sleep,
And lost in flesh. . . .

Placidia (To Valentinian, who is slinking off) No,
Valentinian, stay,
It will be well for you to hear the story,
To know your father's miserable end,
And learn what to avoid.

Satyrus Young gentleman,
Back to your place—a little to the right.
Your father was a soldier, and was fond
Of drink, and dice, and swearing : in the purple
He found that he had nothing left to do,
And simply died.

(Earnestly, as he turns to Placidia) Madam, if I may
speak,
Our little princess is as fresh and hearty
As *(Bowing)* your late consort ; if we cut her off
From every pleasure, we shall lose her too.

Valentinian Why should you trouble, mother, with
the girl ?

I will take care she does not spoil my life.

Placidia I would not have her wed, even for love,
If that were possible.

Satyrus Indeed, what future
Would you determine for her ?

Placidia None at all ;

Attila, My Attila !

Comfort is never with futurity.

Oh, you are far too solemn, all of you.

I want light-hearted children. . . . Nothing deep,

No prying into mysteries ! The young

Should let us take the tragic parts in life,

Us who are older.

*(Turning severally to Valentinian, Satyrus, and Eugenius,
who has entered and stands a little apart)*

If you all combine

To show Honoria how blest she is

In being made Augusta we are safe.

Valentinian But she will learn the truth.

Placidia Concerning life

A woman will believe what she is told,

If she is told it soon enough.

Satyrus Oh then,

Since there's no help, we all will do her honour,

Poor, little princess, to her heart's content.

Valentinian I'll say I wish I had been born a girl.

What sport !

Placidia (To Eugenius) Eugenius, you have had instructions ?

Though you are young, you will retain your office ;

You are correct in conduct, and your manners

Formal and full of deference. There will be

But little need of change in your behaviour

Towards the Augusta. Simply emphasise

Her distance from all ordinary life ;

Attila, My Attila !

Treat her with adoration, we may hope
She will become a goddess. Summon her.

(Exit Eugenius)

Good Satyrus, why do you look so grim ?

Satyrus Because that fellow has your confidence,
And can deceive you with his smirks and bows.

If I were in his place—

Placidia (Smiling) You would do harm,
And make my child a rebel. No contention !

You must support me at this crisis. See,

*(Re-enter Honoria with Eugenius, Marsa, and a
train of girls)*

There is a stormy pout upon her lip,
Her father's pout.

Satyrus They enter like two lovers ;
He takes her hand.

Placidia She is not keeping step,
That is the reason ; now he gives the form
Of salutation.

Satyrus Whispering in her ear !

*(Honoria breaks away from Eugenius, and stands
forward proudly)*

Honoria But, dear ones, I have seen you all before :
I can do nothing for a second time ;
And now I have put on my birthday-dress
My thoughts are of myself. What can you say
Or do to please me, and, above all things,
What is this wonderful, mysterious gift ?

Attila, My Attila !

Placidia I like your carriage. Daughter, ask yourself
What best would minister to your ambition,
Being the grand-child of so great an emperor
As Theodosius. What?

Honorio To have my will
Like him.

Placidia What is your will ?

Honorio I cannot say,
It stretches out so far.

Placidia Youth has no answer
To any question : therefore Destiny
Summons with beckoning finger and no speech.
She summoned Theodosius from his exile
Among the sheep at Cauca, and to-day
She beckons you, his grand-child, to become
A crowned Augusta.

Honorio This is wonderful :

(Looking rapidly at the circle)

And should be joyous, but you all have faces
As after tidings of some great defeat.

Satyrus It is the shock of putting on new manners—
We must not treat you as a little puss
Her very slaves are free to banter with,
But . . .

Honorio What ? You cannot change me in a minute,
And I must have some fun !

Placidia You are an empress.

Honorio But while you live—and there is Valentinian ;

Attila, My Attila !

I cannot understand.

(Valentinian laughs)

Placidia You will be free
From all the cares of state, free to enjoy
Your dignities.

Honorio But what am I to do ?

Placidia The question of a slave ! Still less to do
The higher up one reaches, and at last,
On the throne, nothing.

Satyrus That is perfect bliss.

Honorio Nothing to do !

Placidia But so much to observe.
You will be present when ambassadors
Return, and smile at them when they depart :
You will accept rich gifts and will be envied—
That is a woman's goal—be envied, dear,
By other women.

Honorio While I envy them,
Unless you all are jesting.

Valentinian I'll begin
To show we are in earnest.

(Kneeling) Sacred one,
I swear to treat you as divinity
Whatever you command.

Honorio O Valentinian,
Dear boy, you must not mock me. It is cruel
To-day when I am serious.

(Petulantly) I refuse

Attila, My Attila!

To be Augusta.

Valentinian (Nodding to Placidia) As I told you, mother.

(To Honoria) But this has all been settled by the state

Without your intervention : women's business

Has to be settled so.

Honoria (Flashing out) I would not marry
An emperor at your bidding.

Valentinian (Clapping his hands) Excellent.

O you green girl, you think I want a fellow

To share my throne ! Why, you are made Augusta

To keep you always inaccessible

To any suitor—general, count, or king ;

Not one of them shall plague you—*me*, I mean.

Placidia Hush, Valentinian, when a girl becomes
A woman, it is usual for her mother
To speak to her of life.

Honoria (Passionately) Then you must tell me
What Valentinian meant.

Placidia Not here . . . in private.

Honoria He said you only call me by this title
To keep away my suitors. Is it so ?
Was that his meaning ?

Valentinian (Doggedly) Yes.

Placidia Be dutiful,
And hold your peace.

Honoria He can be silent now.
But am I not to love ?

Placidia You are appointed

Attila, My Attila !

To be the very guardian of the West,
As saintly and in conduct as austere
As

Honorio You ? I never could resemble you,
Not if I wished.

Placidia No, as Pulcheria, child,
Your cousin in the East.

Honorio (*With terrified eyes*) But she's a nun.

Placidia There you mistake : she simply does not marry
Because in all the world there is no suitor
Whom she could wed without humiliation
Or weakening of the empire.

Honorio All the same—

Valentinian She is a virgin.

Honorio Do you think she wishes
Not to be married ?

Placidia She was made Augusta
At the same age as you, and ever since
Has kept her maiden-vow.

Honorio She felt like that.
I do not ! I would rather drop down dead
Than live on like my cousin.

(*With a gesture of despairing appeal*) Mother, you—
This cannot be your doom ! There is no way
Of blessing any human life except
One bless it at the source. You poison mine !
I should have been content with very little,
A birthday kiss, and then, had you been kind—

Attila, My Attila!

But you are making winter now forever,
With just a word, betwixt us. From my heart
So much is gone already of the love
That was kept waiting for you. Bring it back ;
Remove this curse from me !

Placidia Child, it is wisdom
To bear what fate appoints.

Honoria (*Drawing back with a stunned, uncertain
movement, and leaning on the arm of Eugenius*)

If it were fate
It would be easy to endure her tortures :
This misery is something that you choose
To settle on me. It is fate to love,
You cannot alter that—fate to be young
For just a little while. What is your hope ?
You cannot change my nature with the burthen
Of your mock title.

Placidia If I married you,
You could not say you would not be a wife :
You are Augusta—there is no dispute.
I bore you for the purple, I provide
All that your blood requires ; and presently—
I can be patient—I shall see you grow
Reserved and haughty and so beautiful
Knowing you are a goddess ; on the coins
You will be graven, and your name inscribed
As *Salus Reipublicæ*. Respond
To the great future I have wrought for you,

Attila, My Attila!

And let me pass down to my grave content.

Honorio (Loosing her grasp of Eugenius and advancing toward her mother)

So this is your proposal: I become
The simple consolation of your age
By having no experience of my own,
No life unlinked from the starved end of yours,
No dreams I dream until they come to pass,
No taste of what I covet, no response!
But what must be must be: the old shall learn
The terror of that maxim. What must be
Must be, if youth decrees it. You may order
My name graved on the coins and make your idol
Of any clay that mixes. . . .

Placidia In three hours
You will receive the formal recognition
Of your new honour.

(She turns to go, then says to Satyrus, who is hurriedly lifting the curtain at the door)

Gently, Satyrus,

The girl must be rebuked.

(To Honorio) When you are old
You will not waste your time in prophecy;
You will be in possession of events,
And silently dispose them to your will.
(Exit with Valentinian, Satyrus, and train. Honorio, with a wave of her hand, dismisses her women. Then, turning to Marsa, puts her arms round her neck)

Attila, My Attila !

Honorio O Marsa, I have had one birthday-gift ;
But have you nothing for me, nothing real ?
I am not changed, but you are not yourselves.
I think that I shall die or else go mad
If you desert me, and become my servants.
Can you not speak to me ?

Marsa We all, dear princess,
Have gifts ; their presentation is reserved.

Honorio Why then, no thanks at all.

(Eugenius goes out quietly)

There is a question—

But first, you are my friend ?

Marsa You doubt it, dear ?

Honorio Then tell me, Marsa, you who are a wife,
What is it I am missing ?

Marsa Oh, I cannot !
There is no modesty in such discourse,
And Juno shuts our lips.

Honorio (Turning away) Then we are strangers,
The girl and wife, and never can be friends—

(In a frenzied voice) Unless, indeed, some mighty conqueror

Should take me captive. Ah, how glorious
If such a thing could be ! If Attila
Could lay siege to Ravenna !

Marsa Are you mad ?

Honorio (Continuing) And bear me off and take me to
the tents,

Attila, My Attila !

The filthy tents your husband shudders at.
I should not be afraid.

Marsa You do not know
What you are talking of.

Honoria (With a defiant smile) But I can guess.
There would not be a wedding and a mother,
But the free air and the great Tartar Chief.
We should make terms ! I should be capable.
But, as you say, it is too wild a hope—
Ravenna is impregnable.

Marsa (With pity) Dear princess !

*(Eugenius has been standing by the door with a bunch
of fresh roses in his hand. Honoria at last perceives
him)*

Honoria What have you there, Eugenius ?

Eugenius (Kneeling) Very humbly
I pray for leave to offer you these roses
As my poor present.

(Raising his eyes) Lady, all the years
You live will be most happy to the subjects
You love or stoop to honour : to yourself
May they be sweet !

*(She lifts a branch and smells the roses, smiling at
Eugenius)*

Honoria That is a wish—your roses
Are sweet now, as you offer them, how sweet !
Why, they are all I have. I never held them
Loose in my hands like this : I touched them only

Attila, My Attila !

When I was drinking, or in wreaths or crowns
As the Augusta should. But I can pluck them,
Can blow the stiff buds open if I choose,
And crush them in my fingers.

Marsa Chamberlain,
It is not kind of you to bring your gift—
And out of form as well.

Eugenius But for the future,
Trust me, good Marsa, I shall serve my mistress
As one some day to mingle with the gods,
When once she takes upon her the new state
For which we are preparing. I must go—

(*To Honoria*) But first your pardon.

Honoria I am fond of flowers.

(*He goes quickly into the ante-room. Honoria plays
with the flowers in silence*)

Marsa (*Breaking the silence*) If I could see you married—by and by ;

Say to some subject king.

Honoria A subject king
My husband—then ?

Marsa Oh, you would understand
If you were married.

Honoria To some subject king ?

Marsa Yes, even then, for you would be a bride.

Honoria And is that everything ?

Marsa I think it is.

Honoria Ah, now you tell me all I need to know !

Attila, My Attila !

Marsa And when at last the hope of motherhood . .

Honoria Hush, you are right ! We cannot speak of this—

You are so far beyond me. Kiss me, *Marsa* !

Again, again ! (*They kiss*) Now leave me to myself.

(*Exit Marsa*)

(*Honoria holds the roses high up above her*)

A young man's gift ! He gave them with his eyes

As well as with his hands : their odour pierces ;

They shine with youth and water-drops and silver ;

Their flush goes through me.

If there were no need

To learn the secrets of my womanhood

From matrons and from mothers ; if this way

The roses take to open to the sun

And to enjoy were right ! I am beginning

To think all life is simple and we want

No masters in it, if we will but live.

Only the courage seems impiety

For just a girl to dare to be herself.

The dear, old gods were great enough to know

All that we have to give, all that we suffer :

I wish that I had lived in pagan times !

But even now will not youth answer youth ?

This is so bold a course that I should like

To pray before I go on it : yet all

The Church has taught me seems to slip away.

(*She goes towards the ante-room and calls*) Eugenius !

Attila, My Attila !

Eugenius (*Sweeping the curtain back as he runs forward*)

What, the voice of my most dear,
My most adored, young mistress !

Honorio *Most adored—*

How ? In what way ?

Eugenius Sweet lady, I am come
Fresh from your mother and she teaches me
That henceforth I must serve you with the honour
We give to what is infinitely high,
Apart and sovereign.

Honorio Ah, and not the honour
You give to any woman whom you love ?

Eugenius Princess, not that : we love and would attain ;
When we adore it is impossible
To hunger for possession.

Honorio (*Turning and looking out over the terrace*) There
is nothing
In all that sunny earth that is *adored* ;
Each thing is loved. Oh, I am envious !
They treat me as a part of yonder world
Where God and all His saints are overhead ;
While really I am just a maiden-girl
Who would be loved, who would not be left out
By April, who . . .

(*She suddenly kisses him*)

Eugenius (*Repulsing her*) Is this your majesty ?
I will not bear your tortures ! If I do
My part, do yours : be distant and official.

Attila, My Attila !

Honorio Oh, this is terrible ! Is Love a Count
Of the Domestics, some great personage
High in esteem ? I am so ignorant,
I thought Love was a god.

Eugenius You are not such
A child but you can put men on the rack,
Bring them to banishment and . . .

Honorio (*With defiant eagerness*) Was Evander
Sent to the Chersonese because of me ?

Eugenius How your eyes sparkle ! Yes, because you
plagued him,
And kept him at your heels, he had to go.
And, my fair mistress, there are other men—

Honorio So many !

Eugenius You cajole.

Honorio (*Tossing her head*) Whom I admire.

Eugenius I know—that beast Metellus ?

Honorio Yes.

Eugenius And then
Julian and Sextus, either at a pinch.

Honorio Yes, you are right.

Eugenius And the ambassadors.

Honorio Oh, they amuse me.

Eugenius But you love that fool,
Your brother's friend, young Paulus.

Honorio (*Taking up Eugenius' roses, smelling them, and
looking at him from just above the bunch*) Do you
think

Attila, My Attila !

Young Paulus loves me ? Has he ever said ?

Now, dear Eugenius, tell me ?

Eugenius He has said

He would not have you for Rome's richest province.

Honorio (*Tossing the roses away*) How hateful of him !

But Evander perhaps

Was of a different mood ?

Eugenius Yes, he adored you ;

I know it as a fact you broke his heart.

Honorio And he is in the Chersonese—how sad !

And yet I envy him. It must be gloomy

On those wild shores ; but, if he really loves,

The time will pass by quickly. Happy thought !

I am Augusta—he shall be recalled.

Eugenius (*In vibrating tones*) Is that worth while ?

Honorio (*Haughtily*) Yes, for so great a gift,

Eugenius You love him then ?

Honorio I cannot tell before !

It brings a burning rapture to my body

To think of him.

Eugenius (*Violently clasping her in his arms*) Then I
will take his place.

These are an exile's kisses, these and these !

That fellow at the Euxine—I have stood

In banishment beside you every day,

A madness in my heart to spread this fire

Across your cheeks, your breast, to hold your lips

Thus helpless to my pleasure.

Attila, My Attila !

(*Laughing*) I will have
A more voluptuous memory to soothe
My exile than that wretched courtier.
Now kiss me !

Honoria (Drawing back) Do you boast ?

Eugenius A little while
To dream I am your equal, that this hair
Is mine, and I may push it from your neck
All back and then—

Honoria (Restraining him by a caress) Your hair is bright
enough,
Much like Apollo's.

(*Setting herself free*) Do not speak so fiercely,
Or dream of boasting, for that wounds me. What !
You can be thinking of another hour
When you will brag of this one ! Do not touch me
As if without my leave.

Eugenius (Bitterly) Oh, I expected
That this would follow : you would recollect
I am your chamberlain.

Honoria And not my lover !
Oh then, begone !
That I should ever kiss my chamberlain,
I, the Augusta ! I must die of shame.

(*She turns away angrily as she hears his derisive
laugh. There is absolute silence : then he gives a
shivering moan. She turns back and speaks in a
changed voice*)

Attila, My Attila !

Eugenius, when you heard the flutes last night
I sat and watched you. It was wonderful
How all the primness passed out of your face :
What were you thinking of ?

Eugenius Oh, not the flutes !
Honorio, sweet, you madden me.

Honorio Again
That soft, large freedom fills your eyes. Forget
All but the music.

(Laying her hand on his arm) You have learnt my
name.

(They embrace)

ACT II

Attila, My Attila!

ACT II

SCENE—*The same as Act I. Some months later.*

HONORIA *is sitting on the raised seat, her hands clasped round the back of her head. She seems to be in reverie and smiles to herself. The curtain on the left is drawn aside; EUGENIUS enters and approaches her.*

Eugenius Augusta, the ambassador desires
An audience, if your leisure . . .

Honoria You would say
Anthemius is starting—bring him in,
You foolish boy, and do not look so formal.

Eugenius But, dearest, be discreet.

Honoria (Clouding) Behind my chair,
I shall forget your presence.

*Eugenius opens the curtain and admits ANTHEMIUS
and MARSA; then, having introduced them, he
leans against the wall behind Honoria's seat,
looking sullen and anxious)*

Marsa too!

Attila, My Attila !

Marsa Lady, my husband comes to say farewell.

Honorio Again, and very soon. (*To Anthemius*) You must be sorry

To leave your new-born child.

Anthemius My little daughter !

Yes, but I leave her with the dearest guardian
Whom I regret still more.

Honorio I understand.

It must be hard to part ; but, darling Marsa,
You need not look so sad, an embassy
Does not mean bloodshed.

Marsa It may mean detention
Among the Scythian waggons.

Honorio Oh, what fun,
And what adventure ! How I love to hear
Of the black hordes. (*Turning sharply round to Eugenius*)
You know, Eugenius,
They bellow like wild beasts, their countless drums
Keep echo ringing, and their cavalry . . .

Eugenius Faugh, princess, these are scarcely fairy-
tales
For an imperial ear.

Honorio (*Haughtily*) Oh, *you* think that !
We like strong contrasts, and it interests us
To hear about the bowl of ivy-wood
Our hero drinks from, and his simple fare.

Marsa Princess, of flesh—raw flesh.

Anthemius Or cooked between

Attila, My Attila !

The thigh and saddle.

Eugenius An imperial taste
Calls *that* simplicity !

Honorio A chamberlain
Is not the fitting censurer of kings.

Eugenius You think the gulf between too deep ?

Honorio I do.

Shall we in silken chambers judge a captain
Who never leaves his saddle, rides and rides
From Caucasus to the Armorian Field.

It is so ignorant.

Eugenius And wonderful
A lady cares to champion a wretch
Who never changes anything he wears
Until it drops away, who eats his meat
As jackals do, whose face is horrible.

Honorio Eugenius, peace ! Our envoy owns the Hun,
When mounted on his wiry steed, a presence
To pause before, admiring. If we dared,
If we had courage to encounter him,
What battles would be waged, for he is great
And free as a wood-centaur.

Anthemius Shall I take him,
Augusta, your defiance ?

Honorio (*Laughing*) No, my faith
He is not what the soldiers he inspires
With such base terror paint him. Say, Augusta
Counts him a hero and a hunter-devil,

Attila, My Attila !

And laughs at his adventures.

Anthemius I must go.

Marsa (*Advancing to embrace him*) Farewell.

Anthemius Oh, you will come a little further ?

Marsa (*Shaking her head and glancing toward Eugenius*)

My place is with the princess.

Honorio Marsa, go !

We must not leave the fathers of our children,
Not till we must. Go with him to the cradle,
Then with him to the door, and, if you will,
Take him aboard, and watch the vessel out
From the long wharf at Classis. It is calm,
Yet breezy too—a most delicious day.

Anthemius And you a goddess. Vale !

(*Exeunt Anthemius and Marsa. Eugenius lets the
curtain fall behind them and comes back quickly
to Honorio*)

Honorio I, a goddess !

No, but at last a woman, very woman,
With not a touch of miracle about me,
Except, except . . . for surely you can guess
Why I am kind to Marsa ? O dear love,
And you too will not be what you have been,
Mere man, you too will have another name,
You too—

Eugenius My God, I feared that this would come !

(*He turns away*)

Honorio What ! You can stand and look out at the sea

Attila, My Attila !

As if that flying sail were of account,
When I have breathed my secret in your ear,
And promised you such honour ?

Eugenius (*Facing her coldly*) Honour !—Death.

Honorio Impossible ! But can you think of that
Now ? Why, Eugenius, I have heard that mothers
Die very often when their babes are born.
What if they do ! I never had a fear,
Nor any of my people ; we are all
Free-born, accustomed to vicissitude,
And take a change of fortune as the changes
Of wind or weather : you must be the same.

Eugenius Why should I ? You have always treated
me

As an inferior ; you will treat my child,
Out of your pride, as an inferior too.
You love me !—but I never shall forget
The different voice with which you speak to counts
And generals, the way you let me feel
I stand behind them, and your little laugh
When I draw back : these things have injured me
Like drops of burning oil upon my skin
One after one—what hell ! And I have nothing
To put against them but a single hour
Of mastery you gave in ignorance,
In wantonness, and then . . .

Honorio You must be mad !
Oh, you have disappointed me—the names .

Attila, My Attila !

That you have given to this love of mine,
Simply because it was conferred on you !
You called it an intrigue.

Eugenius And so it is.

Honorio You said you should regret it.

Eugenius (*With a despairing gesture*) Well, I do.

Honorio Oh why ? I am Augusta, at my will
Able to give protection. For a time

My mother may be angry ; but she loved
All of herself, like me, when she was young ;
And then my father was not of her rank.
We shall be wedded ; you will be received
Augustus here, and someday in the East :
For very shortly I shall take your hand,
And say that you are mine, and claim the future.

Eugenius O damn the future ! Do you call this
love ?

Why thrust me forward ? I am not your bridegroom,
I never can be ; leave me out of count,
If you regard my safety. Tell your mother
Of your condition, but of nothing else,
And she will see you through. (*He turns to leave her*)

Honorio You cast me off ?
That will be very lonely.

Eugenius (*Returning*) If you take it
Like that, and if it costs you anything
To know we shall be severed all our lives . . .
But you have made me play with life and death

Attila, My Atilla!

As with the rattling dice-box.

Honorio If I thought,

Dear love, that any harm could come to you . . .

Eugenius Oh, you are such a child! But there is
nothing

That you can do can alter my delight

In you, in every motion, every glance,

The way you turn your head, your very anger.

(He caresses her)

Honorio (Returning his caress) Then put away your
fears, for I am certain,

As if a god had sworn it, you are safe.

Come, be yourself again, just what you were

That April day.

Eugenius Ah, would it might be so—

You just the same!

Honorio (Angrily) It is a sacrilege

To wish that, and an insult. I am sorry

You give my news no welcome, but it matters

Less than I could have thought.

(As if addressing a Servant) See that my couch

Has warmer wraps upon it, for I like

To lie out in the sunshine. I am going

To peep at Marsa's baby, and to nurse it

If it is crying for her.

*(She goes toward the door, glances back at Eugenius,
breaks into laughter, and returns to him)*

Do not look

Attila, My Attila !

So wretched ! Oh these men, how strange they are !
How brief and poor their happiness, while ours
Grows with us, like a summer, night and day,
And day and night.

*(She kisses him while Satyrus draws back the curtains
of the door, unperceived)*

There, I forgive you freely.

Eugenius Hush ! Some one comes.

*(He leaves her and stands at a distance, looking out
toward the harbour, indifferently. Enter Satyrus)*

Honorio (Turning) You want me, Satyrus ?

A message from my mother ?

Satyrus No, Augusta.

I want your chamberlain.

Honorio And there he is,
Watching Anthemius' vessel.

But this scowl . . .

I am quite glad I am not the offender.

You are the only person in the world

It grieves me to offend.

Satyrus Dear, little lady,

As you the only one I cannot thwart.

Honorio I know ; we spoil each other. I believe

You rather would connive at anything

Than own your little princess in a fault.

Now would you not ? You are so much my friend.

Satyrus As faithful as the dust is to your feet,
For only you yourself can shake me off.

Attila, My Attila !

Where are your women ?

Honorio Marsa is away ;
I sent her with her husband.

Satyrus Pooh ! Your service
Should be her first concern.

Honorio But I dismissed her.

Satyrus As I dismiss you to Eurynome,
Your nurse, you little scapegrace ! You will bring us
Poor fellows to the headsman. Bid her call
The retinue your mother has appointed
To wait on you, the mutes and all the slaves—
The *women-slaves*, remember ! Now be good.

*(Exit Honorio, playfully half thrust through the door
by Satyrus, who walks up, as soon as she is gone,
to Eugenio)*

Eugenio What do you want ?

Satyrus I am a messenger.

Eugenio Well, I am quite attentive.

Satyrus Very so—

But soon you will be, for the Empress sends
To bid you wait her coming in this room ;
And I am not to leave you.

Eugenio (Shortly) This is strange.

Satyrus I thought it strange, but I obey her will.
I thought it strange she ordered me to watch
The princess and report how she preserved
Her dignity ; but listen, chamberlain,
I do not any longer think it strange.

Attila, My Attila!

Eugenius Why?

Satyrus I have seen her stoop.

Eugenius What have you seen?

Satyrus She kissed you, dog!

Eugenius She did not.

Satyrus Yes, she did.

I saw her from the passage. Have you thought
How even a kiss could ruin her?

Eugenius Indeed

You would be less than man if you should tell
Of my—

Satyrus O leave your infamy alone!

I know your secret: women do not kiss
Like that a stranger to their arms. You tremble;
Yes, and your handsome blood has left your face.
You look but half a man, or scarcely one
At all—though you have stained her.

Eugenius It is false.

Satyrus I do not need your lies to make me sure:
By those white lips it is too evident
I speak the truth.

Eugenius Betray what you have seen;
That's all you can betray: but I am lost
With that . . . the Empress is so terrible.

Satyrus If you are lost, then you will lose yourself;
I shall not harm you by a single word.

Eugenius You will not?

Satyrus No . . . or rather by my silence

Attila, My Attila !

I shall protect Augusta. As for you,
I should be glad to march you to the gate,
And hand you to an executioner.
The Empress has not told me why she wishes
To speak with you, but from her face I judge
She comes about this business. Keep your wits,
And listen ! She will try to find the man—
But must not find him ; it would wound to death
The honour of Augusta : if a child
Is born, much better it be fatherless
Than fathered on a servant. Let opinion
Give it to some great Count—you understand ?

Eugenius Yes. When the Empress questions—

Satyrus You deny ;

I simply hold my tongue. Ah, here she comes.

(Enter Galla Placidia)

Placidia Eugenius !

Eugenius Madam ?

Placidia I am here to speak

On a most solemn matter, delicate,
Concerning the imperial honour, deeply
Touching my own . . . for I have heard report
The princess is with child. Her nurse believes
The scandal ; I have watched her constantly,
And I am almost sure it is not false.
What do you think ? You are her chamberlain ;
Have you the least ground for believing it ?
Answer !

Attila, My Attila !

Eugenius (*In a low voice*) I have not.

Placidia Have you, Satyrus ?

By my command you watched her.

Satyrus No, I have not.

She often talked and jested first with this
And then with that great noble. She is free,
And showers her smiles and graceful, little questions
On all her courtiers.

Placidia You adhere to this ?

Satyrus I do. I cannot fix on any one
She seemed to favour most.

Placidia (*To Eugenius*) And you, it seems,
Suspected nothing ? You are rather backward,
I fancy, in your protest.

Eugenius I am ?—No.

Placidia Well, Satyrus, Eugenius, I have vowed
By every means to search this treason out,
By every means ; I will give lavishly :
And, if you are afraid to speak the truth,
You, Satyrus, or you, gold and my favour
Should make you fearless.

Satyrus The reward is great,
But I have nothing I can give for it,
No evidence, not even the least surmise
To offer for your treasure.

Eugenius Nor have I.

Placidia Further, Eugenius, if you have received
A bribe from the seducer, I extend

Attila, My Attila !

My pardon to you if you give his name.

Eugenius I cannot . . . but—

Satyrus (*Quickly*) We neither of us know.

Placidia (*To Eugenius*) I hold you, as Augusta's
chamberlain,

Responsible for this calamity ;

Unless you track the wretch, who dared dishonour

The princess in your charge, my will is fixed :

You will be questioned under sharpest torture,

And if that fails to move you, then your life

Will pay the penalty of your neglect.

Eugenius Torture !

Placidia You also, Satyrus, will suffer

The same examination and same end

Unless the work I trusted you to do

Is done efficiently.

Satyrus But death and torment

Are useless as your gold, for I have nothing

I can reveal—as yet.

Placidia So fine a bloodhound

As you will track the victim.

(*Eugenius watches him breathlessly*)

Satyrus Who can tell !

But if I do not—then I know my fate.

Placidia Yes. (*To Eugenius*) It is also yours. You
realise—

Torture and then the executioner

Out at the western gate : but torture first.

Attila, My Attila !

Eugenius O Empress, Empress, if I am to find
The man who has so angered you, at least
Give me conditions I can offer him—
Can offer anyone I might suspect—
To win him to avowal, for your mercy . . .

Satyrus I will not offer mercy in my search.
Empress, forbid such trifling ; keep the law.

Placidia I do not care if mercy or the law
Find me the girl's seducer.

Eugenius Then, I hope,
You deign to give conditions ?

Placidia Yes, his life,
If he will make avowal—his bare life :
Not an escape from punishment.

Satyrus Such grace
Is scarcely worth a thought.

Eugenius You will not torture ?

Placidia We use that to extort confession, not
As punishment.

Eugenius Oh then, I need not seek :
The man is here.

Placidia You ?

Eugenius (*Falling on his knees*) I am he.

Placidia (*Moving far back from him*) My daughter
Could give herself to him, a caitiff-slave !
Yet from the first I never had a doubt ;
I saw her profanation in his face,
And I determined I would make his tongue

Attila, My Attila !

Own, what his face revealed, or, if I could not,
Would force you, honest Satyrus, to find
Occasion for convicting him. I knew
You were his mortal enemy ; and yet
You could not see his guilt !

Satyrus It took your wisdom
To find him out ; although his vile conditions
Made me suspect at last.

Placidia If I but wielded
The might to strike him dead !

Satyrus But he is safe ;
You were too clement.

Placidia Yet his wish to live
Will prove his worst calamity.

Satyrus (*Joyously*) It will !
What shall you do with him ?

Placidia Dismiss him first
For some trumped-up dishonesty, some stealing
Of revenue : that done, he shall be scourged
With the iron-knotted lash they use for slaves,
And banished to the Aquilegian mines.
So, he has saved his life.

(*Re-enter Honoria, with Valentinian and Marsa*)

Honoria (*To Marsa*) You watched the vessel ?—
Eugenius, what has happened ?

(*From the moment he confessed he has been kneeling,
his head bowed over his arms. At Honoria's
voice he looks up ; then bows his head again*

Attila, My Attila!

and sobs, low at first, but with increasing passion)

Placidia You are here
In time to see the partner of your guilt
Sunk in humiliation. Look at him—
The servant you intrigued with!

*(Marsa makes an instinctive movement of horror from
Honorias side)*

Honorias (Low to her) Not by me!
Go yonder to my mother.

Valentinian Do you mean
That slave upon his knees has injured her?
Beast! *(He goes violently toward Eugenius)*

Honorias Valentinian, you are not his judge:
You are not fit to judge us.

Placidia I am judge,
And this your rightful place. Come here, my son.

*(She points to her right hand and speaks to him as he
joins her)*

*Honorias (Defiantly walking up to Eugenius and putting
her hands on his neck)*

Eugenius, rise! It is not in this way
Our love should be declared. A criminal,
When you should be a lover! Side by side
We should have fired my mother to remember
How in her days of youth she found the sweetness
Of breathing was to love; then, by my father,
Implored her to forget you were not royal:

Attila, My Attila !

But you have given away your fate and mine
By this behaviour, and to hear you weep
Is blasphemy. O stop !

Placidia You shall not speak,
Girl, of my love for one who was a hero,
An honourable wooer ; I forbid
Your father's honest name to pass your lips.
As for that man—take off your hands from him !
His doom is settled.

Honorio I too am Augusta ;
My title can protect him.

Valentinian You Augusta !
You look sublime in contact with that worm—
A goddess, worship her !

Placidia This childish folly
Must end. The wretch is sentenced.

Honorio If you mean
The title you conferred on me is empty
As now you make it, then I must beseech
At least a hearing from the true Augusta.
I gave myself ; my lover never spoke
His love, or sought to win me. This is truth—
Yes, by my very lineage ; and in justice
I ask his life.

Placidia You need not. It was granted
As price of his confession.

Satyrus He betrayed you
For that—his life.

Attila, My Attila !

Honorio (*Taking away her hands from Eugenius' neck
and shrinking back*) Eugenius, you could do it !
I must have dreamt about you, and I wake
To find . . . O Satyrus !

(*Eugenius sobs more bitterly*)

Valentinian A rich reward
For trusting an informer.

Placidia You are sorry
At last and own your sin ?

Honorio I am not sorry.
No, I am glad I meet you as a woman,
I meet you as a mother. Shall I own
A sin, when nothing but the purest impulse
Of nature called, with that deliciousness
That we are born to follow, and I went
With peace and utter faith where I was led !
That is not sin. But now there is a crime
Indeed, for which I burn. It cannot make
The change in me a mockery, but, oh,
It mocks at love, at everything I did,
At innocence and honour.

(*Eugenius springs up and comes toward her, but not
near*)

Eugenius Do not think
I, your vile servant, did not give you love,
Although I have betrayed it. Deeper far
Than any treason is the truth *I loved* ;
It is my only truth, just as the leper's

Attila, My Attila !

One truth—he once was well.

Honorio You have your life.

Why do you speak to me when there is nothing
That I can do for you ?

Eugenius (With a cry) Princess, your pardon !

Honorio (Her face averted) Nothing that I can do.

If we discover

The gold coin we have used as gold is false,

Is counterfeit, there is no talk of pardon :

Gold is too precious. Do not plead again !

You make me gasp for breath.

Eugenius But turn your face !

Think of the years that I shall famish for you,

Shut in those awful mines among the slaves.

Honorio I am not hard—if it can give you pleasure—

(She turns and looks at him)

Eugenius O ecstasy ! *(He seizes her hands)* To
hold these firm, warm hands

Again—one instant ! Kiss me !

Valentinian Infamous !

Take that, you dog !

*(He strikes him in the face across his mouth. Eugenius
staggers an instant, then stands, with clenched
hands, as if waiting)*

Placidia Son, you debase yourself

Even by touching him. Call in the guard.

Remember, he is charged with larceny.

(Eugenius breaks into a short laugh and glances defiantly)

Attila, My Attila !

at Placidia, but, meeting Honoria's eyes, bows his head and continues still waiting)

Honoria (Mechanically taking up her mother's words)

—Call in the guard ! *(Going to her mother)* And now my punishment.

(Raising her hands to her temples) Or have I borne it all ? It must be past,

I think, already.

Placidia It is not begun,

But soon will be in force. You will be sent,
When possible, to Theodosius' court,
And placed among your cousins in their house,
Where they devote their virgin days to prayer,
Their needle and their studies. As attendant,
I place you in the charge of Satyrus,
Parting from his true service for the sake
Of your complete security. Meanwhile
You will be strictly kept within your room
Till some few months are passed.

Honoria You look so cold,
So dead ! O mother, this is horrible :
You fill me with alarm lest . . .

Placidia Come away ;
The guard will soon be here, and I insist.

Honoria (Piteously) Marsa, come too !—And Satyrus
will come !

(Suddenly, with a sharp, frightened cry, falling on her knees, and clasping her hands)

Attila, My Attila !

O mother, by the little, silver coffin

In which your life is buried—save my child !

*(Eugenius makes a movement toward her, then lets his
arms fall, and goes on waiting)*

ACT III

Attila, My Attila !

ACT III

SCENE—*The library of the royal palace at Byzantium. Several steps lead up to a central apse, surrounded by windows that command the walls, and beyond that, a view of the Scythian tents.*

Towards the centre of the room there is a table on which rolls of parchment and colours used for illuminating are laid.

Pulcheria, dressed as a nun, and Satyrus.

Pulcheria You know I am intensely fond of her.

Satyrus I do believe you love her.

Pulcheria As my life.

Satyrus Yet all these bitter years what have I seen,
What have I had to see ? A little figure,
Thin, mournful—eyes in which the light was glazed,
And fingers busy with the broidery-frame
They loathed the touch of. She is not a creature
To thrive on barley-cakes and cold commands :
So, I beseech you, pardon her at once !
What was her crime ? She talked with Maximin
One day when he returned from embassy

Attila, My Attila !

To Attila, beyond the gates : and, think !
How natural that she should thirst for news
Of this strange conqueror she used to worship
As if the land of fairy gave him birth.
It is a week since you imprisoned her :
If she should die

Pulcheria I tell you, Satyrus,
That there is nothing with a blessing in it
I would not pluck down on her head, no flower,
Or starry wreath, or secret, favouring air.
Die !—do you think that I could let her die,
Who is the one live creature in our midst,
Who might become what I shall never be,
A saint, a power with God ; so rich a nature,
Such Roman courage, and a power to light
Whole empires as the sun ! If you speak truth,
If I indeed have killed her—

Satyrus No ; take heart !
Lies are enough to bring one to despair,
They so perplex the mind ; but truth has always
A kind of comfort in it : you have time
To save my little mistress. Give her freedom
To eat and sleep and play just as she pleases,
And leave all things she ought to do undone—
For that is so delightful I have known it
Restore a raving madman to his wits.

Pulcheria But I have such high hope of her.

Satyrus Oh, then

Attila, My Attila !

My counsel must be followed ! Let your hope
Be as a hope the weather will be fine ;
But do not force her : in your noble zeal
You need not treat her as a common slave.
I saw your sister strike her in the face
A week ago—it was an ugly sight !

Pulcheria You saw that with your eyes ?

Then no more justice,

No struggle to be fair—the eddying sway
And current of my passion.

Lead her in !

(Exit Satyrus)

And now I will be deaf to all their voices,
And simply feast on her. She will despise me ;
There are some deeds I would not have her witness
For all the world that shortly must be done ;
And yet through this free pardon . . . but no matter !
Although she brings me to a tingling sense
Of misery, although I dread her comment
As if it were God's comment on my soul,
I cannot live without her.

(Re-enter Satyrus, with Honoria in the dress of a novice)

Oh, her face !

Honoria Cousin Pulcheria, have you had a dream,
And is it in obedience to a vision
You suddenly unlock my prison doors ?

Pulcheria Dearest, a yearning for your face.

Honoria My women

Attila, My Attila !

Tell me my hair is gray—I do not know—
But it may interest you to see the change !

(She throws back her hood)

For I am now returned from discipline
So much more than a penitent, a power,
Strong as a hermit from the rocks. At last
I have a kingdom where you cannot come,
And beat the bliss right out of me, at last
I have escaped you. In this dull, weak world
I feel the pressure of a sovereign force
Outside me and within. You ate and slept
While I was starved and waking—oh, I thank you !
I have had revelation. Do not ask me
What I have seen !

(Turning to Satyrus) Some wine, a little fruit !

(Exit Satyrus)

Pulcheria (taking Honoria's hand) Open your heart
to me !

Honoria If you mean kindness—

Pulcheria A mother's kindness.

Honoria Leave me to myself.

*(She closes her eyes. Pulcheria goes out, as if banished,
just as Satyrus returns with wine and fruit)*

If I could get more strength !

(Stroking the hand of Satyrus, as he offers the fruit) This
wrinkled hand

Tells me I am not yet in Paradise,
Although quite sure of it. You would lay down

Attila, My Attila!

Your life to serve me, would you not ?

Satyrus My life—

Truly a perfect offering ! It is yours.

Honorio O Satyrus, they think I'm growing old,
But really I have had quite time enough
Through these long, fourteen years of misery
To grow both old and young again. The spring
Must come again into one's life some day—
And it has been such winter ! Fourteen years !
Not exile !—I should like to be so much,
Much further off from anyone who owns me,
Or who has ever called me by my name.
You have no relatives ?

(Satyrus shakes his head)

How fortunate !

If earth were free of them and one might start
Quite fresh among the strangers, making friends
Just as one could ! Sometimes I seem to breathe
Where a new country steals across my senses
As softly as the summer. Fourteen years !
And what have I been doing all the while ?
Nothing at all, oh, nothing !—until love
Came and encamped around my life as round
This city the black tents of Attila.
Love !

Satyrus But, dear mistress, you have been forbidden
To have a second lover.

Honorio (Heedless) Far away,

Attila, My Attila !

And where Time was not, I was in the arms
Of a great hero—very fire of love
The breath and the embrace !

Satyrus How pitiful !

I know this kind of dream and how it haunts ;
It has no root in possibility.
I wish you had not dreamed a dream like that.

Honorio But do not be so listless ; you must help
To bring it all to pass. I count on you.
Who else is there to help me ?

Satyrus Be explicit,
My darling princess, if you have commands.

Honorio Most certainly I have. It is so simple
To execute when one has dreamed the whole.
These people fussing round me do not dream ;
They have their faith, and hope, and prayer, and not
The whole strong web before them. All is fixed,
And we have just to move into our places,
I and—

Satyrus Your hero ?

Honorio My deliverer.

Satyrus At least his name ?

Honorio No, guess it, *Satyrus*.

Satyrus Some name they give a cloud !

Honorio A thunder-cloud.

Who is it that is mixed up with our thoughts
So that the air is charged with him ; who is it
That is not east nor west, but has an empire

Attila, My Attila !

That reaches to the borders of the world ?

Satyrus The Church has *that*.

Honorio Who is it that can hold

The Church in awe, to whom the Pope himself
Bows down ? Oh, you are stupid !—Attila,
My Attila !

I never have been mated,
I have a soul to give that is Augusta,
That cannot stoop. While the barbarian women
Contend around his tents, I have decreed
His passion shall be drawn across the borders
To me, I have received his salutation.
O Attila, my Attila !—the dreams
That he is dreaming of me ! If the dead
Can walk to those they love, and force their senses
To sight and hearing, shall my great desire
Fail on its way to him ? It does not fail.
We are betrothed in secret, and my life
Flows to fulfilment of these prophecies
As simply as a river to the sea.
The rest is easy. You must bear a ring . . .

Satyrus The deuce I must !

Honorio And he will claim his bride
The soldier's fashion. This will come to pass.
The world is his ; he scarcely needs to fight,
He conquers by sheer willing : so I purpose
To win my place beside him in the world—
My Attila !

Attila, My Attila !

Satyrus But I would rather see you
Tortured before my eyes. I will not go.
It is an infamy ! Think of your land,
Your mother, your—

Honorio My land has been a prison,
My mother is the murderess of my child,
My lover was—a traitor. I desire
Nothing but retribution on them all.

When the storm bursts
Let me be in the thunder-cloud ! You pause . . .
O faithful, are you faithless when my need
Is so extreme. Why, why will you not go ?

Satyrus His instincts and his habits, his religion,
His language !—faugh ! It is impossible
To love a stranger you have never seen.

Honorio I never saw my child : but he is mine
For ever, and I love him day and night ;
He makes my thoughts about the universe
More soft, and I have freedom in my blood
Because he was created. Then you know
The story of the soul and how it loves
Blindfolded its dear Eros. Take the ring !
(*Satyrus* silently refuses and walks away to a little distance)
You are afraid ?

Satyrus (*Turning*) I am.

Honorio (*Contemptuously*) I thought at least
You still had courage.

Satyrus Do not say such things ;

Attila, My Attila !

You never once have said them—Oh, this taunt !—
Do not, Augusta !

Honorio I am desperate :

I cannot of myself fulfil my passion,
I cannot reach the freedom I desire,
I cannot carry suffering to its end. . . .

(Falling down before him)

O Satyrus, I will not spare you now !
Can you condemn me, *you*, to helplessness,
To life that is not failure, but a blank ?

Satyrus I have but one temptation left—despair.

God, do not wake it !

Honorio It is here with me—

All that might come to pass if I were able
To live my life, and all the odious, long
And fettered way to death because I cannot :
For you have waked despair. Oh, how I hate
Your cruelty ; it sweeps me like a tempest,
It rouses in me wrath and desperation,
Lightning and ice together—horrible !
I am a wreck through you. *(She sobs in frantic misery :
then of a sudden faces him defiantly)* But do not
think

I shall not find a bearer for my ring ;
If you refuse me, I will choose some other,
No trusted servant, but a shifty slave,
And risk that other's treason.

Satyrus (With terror in his face) No, you shall not,

Attila, My Attila !

While I can serve you. If it makes you happy
Just to die wretched in a miry hut
Amid the filth and clatter, fetch your ring,
And I will bear it. This design of yours
Has one or two good points of policy. . . .

Honorio Why were you stubborn, why did you inflict
Such sorrow on us both ? Forgive my cry
Against your harshness, O forgive, forget—

Satyrus (With a sad smile) And do your will ! There
is a fearful strength
Beneath these silken temples. Lose no time.

Honorio There is the ring.

Satyrus But tell me on which hand
Do you propose to fix the magic token ?

Honorio (Putting the ring on Satyrus's right hand)

On this, on this ! Say that I give him all
With this, my faith, my honour, and my love.
Say that I worship him (*Kissing the ring on Satyrus's
finger*).

Satyrus So I have won
A kiss at last.

Honorio Say I am older now—

Satyrus Yes, after fourteen years you have received
That grace of time.

Honorio And am not covetous
Of youth or beauty—

Satyrus Why, I have gray hairs . . .

Honorio But full of admiration for great deeds

Attila, My Attila !

Valour and strength. Say that I feel within
A greatness to wed greatness. Something answers
Deep in my nature to that energy
That makes a waste place of an obstacle.
Say that I fear him.

Satyrus That is ably put,
Fear him and yet desire.

Honoria It is a challenge,
For, if he loves me, Attila must come
And claim me with an army.

Satyrus And your dower ?
He will be keen on that.

Honoria Oh, half the kingdom,
All that his sword can win. You need not speak
To him of dowry.

Satyrus Well, your eyes are bright,
Most starry, preternatural. You have
That way of shining like a goddess through
Your flesh when you are happy : that is why
I like to give you pleasure. Recollect
On my return you must not run to greet me
As if I were a messenger from Zeus ;
But cast a pensive glance at me, and say
I trust the holy John is well in health—
For I must seem to come from conference
With the great hermit who confesses you.

Honoria Oh, run as if you were a messenger
In very earnest. Speed !

Attila, My Attila !

(*Exit Satyrus*) How happiness
Will always be just in a pair of rings,
The giving and the taking, nothing more !
I wonder—will he send me back his own,
And what will be the posy ? . . . Just perhaps
An iron hoop, and I shall miss the art ;
No matter, if it comes from him and is
As strong and simple as his character :
I shall not trouble. Oh, how glad I am,
And young again to-day. I used to think—
But then I was a little fool, sixteen —
That I must beg for love upon my knees,
Instead of loving, breaking into bloom
Myself, and feeling all the crush of flowers.

(*As she leans from a window, THEODOSIUS comes in
with ARCADIA and MARINA, both dressed as nuns.
He goes up to his painting-table, while his sisters
sit down at a great embroidery-frame*)

Theodosius You, little cousin, are you here alone ?
I met your eunuch ; he avoided me.
Where was he going ?

Honorio Simply from my presence.
I had dismissed him. Let me see your painting.
Dear Theodosius, you are happy now
Among your missals—

(*As she comes from the window toward him Pulcheria's
voice is heard outside*)

Pulcheria Is the Emperor here ?

Attila, My Attila !

(Honorio draws back again into the window-recess, and Theodosius begins to paint. Pulcheria enters hurriedly, without noticing Honorio : she looks scornfully at Theodosius, and tosses some rolls of parchment on the table)

Then, Theodosius, you are ignorant
Of my instructions to the envoys ?

Theodosius (Carelessly) Yes.

How well these scarlet stems run up and down,
A net-work on the blue ! I call this page
My masterpiece.

Pulcheria Indeed ! But let it be,
And give me your attention. In your name
I sent the three ambassadors with gold . . .

Theodosius Good !

Pulcheria With a donative—you understand ?
A subsidy.

Theodosius Oh good !

Pulcheria You do not mind ?

Arcadia Well, anything is better than the sense
Of savages all round.

Marina This Attila
Infests the very air.

Pulcheria He casts a shadow,
I know, a great, black shadow on our thoughts.
But yet to send him bribes . . .

Honorio (At the window) O horrible !

(Pulcheria shudders ; then paces backward and forward)

Attila, My Attila !

Marina When did the envoys start ?

Pulcheria This very hour.

Honorio The envoys at his camp . . .

(*Under her breath*) While Satyrus—

(*She advances impetuously*)

Recall them ! Is it possible the grandchild

Of Theodosius can corrupt a foe ?

Pulcheria (*Turning*) Honorio, my wretched people
starve

For miles beyond the gates. Reason and pity

Urge me to sheathe the sword.

Arcadia And you imagine

Our gifts and flatteries will fail to win

A welcome from the greed of Attila !

Honorio Send after those cursed messengers ! I
warn you—

And I to-day am full of prophecies

That sweep like storms across my soul ; I see

The universe as in a crystal glass—

Avoid this shameful meeting : it will draw

Wide ruin on us all ! I am inspired

To know that this is right and must be done.

(*She moves to the door*)

Arcadia (*Scornfully*) Well, do not rush out in the
street with orders ;

Summon your chamberlain.

Honorio (*As she turns back with drooping hands, and
despair on her face*) It is too late . . .

Attila, My Attila !

(*Passionately*) Before my child was born I saw the eyes
Of murderers round my bed : it is the same
Now, it will be the same throughout my life.
All human creatures round me want to kill
My hopes and my ambitions.

Pulcheria All but one,
A woman, pitted against Attila.

Honorio If I could make you feel how great a power
He is to touch the spring of as a helm—
How he will laugh to see the Roman gold,
For he is no mean, despicable foe
To palter with, but one of those great souls
With whom great souls must dwell in amity.
But there ! I cannot help you : you have bribed him,
Are sending him ambassadors—the shame !

Pulcheria Yes, Roman money and not Roman swords
To drive the devil off ! Oh, how I suffer—
Two nuns, a painter, and myself a weak,
Peace-loving woman, to repel the Hun !

Theodosius You are Augusta !

Pulcheria Ah, I am—in name.

Honorio You bring the blood into my ghostly title.
In name !—but I am in reality :

(*Aside, as she turns to the window*) I am . . . Those
envoys !

Pulcheria Nothing comes to pass
That I desire ; I have no force to rule.

(*Turning fiercely on Theodosius*) You will have none.

Attila, My Attila !

Theodosius I own no genius
For politics.

Pulcheria No sense of your great place,
The awful power it gives you.

*(She comes to him, strikes the brush out of his hand and
opens one of the rolls of parchment before him)*

Read this paper

You signed without a scruple yesterday.

Theodosius (Glancing at it) *Pulcheria !* I signed it. O
my God !

Pulcheria Yes, you condemned to death that fair
Greek maiden,

Who fled to me, an orphan, from the slights

And avarice of her brothers, Athenais.

I had this order laid among the rest ;

You signed each one unread. Go through them now.

We leave you to your thoughts.

(She goes out with Arcadia and Marina)

Theodosius My misery !

How could I do it ? Athenais—love !

*(He tears the death-warrant across, pushes the other
parchments away, and hides his face in his hands.*

Honoria rushes down and puts her arms round him)

Honoria O Theodosius, I am just like you !

I understand—you cannot read the edicts,

For there is only one thing in the world,

Dear fellow, that you care for, but one name.

You are in love.

Attila, My Attila!

Theodosius Beyond all remedy,
And in despair.

Honorio But love should give a strength.
It is because we disbelieve in love
We get so thwarted ; for Time stoops to catch
Our lovers' whispers—in futurity
He plants them as a seed. Do not despair ;
I have a hundred reasons to despair ;
I will not.

Theodosius But you must not turn away
Now you have learnt the truth. Ask me some questions !
My mistress is so perfect.

Honorio You have *seen* her,
The lady that you dote on.

Theodosius Why, of course.

(He shows a page of illumination)

This face, these tresses in their golden plaits . . .
You recognise ?

Honorio How lovely ! Tell me more.

Theodosius But there can be no more. She is not royal ;
The child of a philosopher.

Honorio I thought
Your lip was trembling, oh, I thought you loved her ;
And then—

Theodosius What then, Honorio ! Alas,
The child is pagan.

Honorio Do not speak to me
Of things outside,—the colour of her hair,

Attila, My Attila !

Her birth, and least of all of her religion.
You love her—do you feel the answer back ?
Quick, I am breathless.

Theodosius But I cannot offer
My honourable love. She is a servant,
Low-born, impossible. Oh, I have blundered !
I did not mean to hurt you.

Honoria No, you cannot.
I loved Eugenius, and regret the loving
Not for a single moment of my life.
There! We will speak no more of him. But you,
Dear Theodosius, do not let it pass,
This glory that is rising on your life,
Rising on hers, for love makes life so whole,
Fills up all hollow spaces, enters in
All gaps of solitude : it is the vigil,
The fasting, and the ecstasy in one.

Theodosius Honoria, you speak as if you felt
What I feel now, yet kept in strict seclusion—

Honoria I have seen no man, but I love apart
From time, from sense.

Theodosius This is too difficult :
You must have had a vision.

Honoraria I have drawn
A destiny too great upon my head,
Have claimed so much I never can receive,
A joy that I shall die of if I taste . . .

Theodosius But here is Athenais, and alone.

Attila, My Attila !

What shall I do ?

Honorias Leave everything to me.

(She pushes him behind the embroidery frame ; Athenais goes up to a reading-desk)

Dear Athenais, put away those scrolls,

And I will give you knowledge far more precious

Than any they can give. You are beloved.

Athenais You mean ?

Honorias By him.

Athenais But he will never dare

To marry me, and, princess, I am proud ;

I will not stoop to hear of love unless

He takes me as his consort.

Honorias But he will.

Athenais His sister may despise my parentage,

Although I am the great Leontius' daughter,

And trained in Grecian science ; but if this

Is so, I will return and beg my bread—

For, oh, I do adore him !

Theodosius (Springing forward) I have heard :
I pledge to you my honourable love.

Come with me to my sister. I have chosen,

And, as I am a man, she shall accept.

(To Honorias) My dearest cousin, lonely, little exile,

Tell me of something I could do to give

More sweetness to your life ; for Athenais

And I would grant whatever you desire,

Would we not, love ?

Attila, My Attila !

Athenais We would.

Honorio I shall remember !

But do not think of me.

(*They go out*) How wise they are,
Perfect and fearless.—We shall tread like that
Etzel's red fleeces. Oh, how glorious
To push aside the curtains of a tent,
And feel the breeze, and face the multitude.
My Attila, it is a happy omen,
This pairing of young lovers ! . . . I am certain
The envoys have encountered Satyrus,
Certain they will betray him. But the power
That throws dust into mortal eyes, bewilders,
And carries through its heavenly intents,
Is with me, and no enterprise can fail
That is entirely hopeless. I am safe.

(*Re-enter Pulcheria*)

(*Honorio has stood for a long time looking out. It is now sunset*)

Pulcheria Well, I have blest the lovers. Theodosius,
Through you, is now a man, and I believe
His choice may save him ; it does save the soul,
I think, to have her choice.

Honorio It does, it does !

Pulcheria I dared not thwart him.

Honorio No, you would be damned,
Thwarting the soul's desires

Pulcheria I think I should.

Attila, My Attila !

Honorio, I came to speak of love.

Honorio Then I will listen.

Pulcheria Theodosius says

You have a love apart from time and sense.

He finds that difficult to understand ;

I do not. I have longed through all my life

To love like that and cannot.

Honorio No, indeed !

You talk of ecstasies and I enjoy,

Of the soul's freedom and my soul is free,

You talk of blessedness and I am blessed

Above all other women.

Pulcheria (*Below the steps in front*) I believe
She is God's chosen and will be an empress
Among the saints.

Honorio (*Turning*) You are a hypocrite,
A traitor, sending bribes to Attila.

Ah, I have found you out ! And dare you face

That glory rushing toward us from the sun,

Bearing such honour to us ? I receive it,

It comes in answer to my dream : but you—

Pulcheria I am all names you call me. How you read
Straight down into my heart ! A *hypocrite* ;
For I have seemed a saint and am a sinner ;
And *traitor*, yes, for I have offered bribes.
Honorio, in the light of those gold beams,
Bless me and pardon.

Honorio (*Coming close to her*) I have sat and hated.

Attila, My Attila !

Your face for fourteen years.

Pulcheria I could bear that,
If you would let me be your stepping-stone,
If you would give your family the saint
I may not hope to give it.

Honorio I have hated
My family for more than fourteen years.

Pulcheria Oh, that is nothing, all the saints do that.
I love you as a stranger, with the passion
The heathen give to those who bring them life.
There had been death around me till you came,
You, with your living face and living eyes
And living voice ! (*She tries to embrace her and is re-*
pulsed) Oh, you are pitiless !

Honorio As you are in pursuit.

Pulcheria But do not hate me,
For you are all I have among my own,
All I can build on . . . You have had a vision ;
Repeat the blessed dream to me.

Honorio I will not.

(*Perceiving Satyrus*)

But there are those to whom it has been trusted,
Who can receive it—

(*Enter Satyrus*) Satyrus, what news ?
Where is the ring ? I shudder. Satyrus !

Satyrus Lady, your will is done.

Honorio And he replies—
What ? Do not heed my cousin ; the suspense

Attila, My Attila !

Will kill me ! He replies . . . ? O Satyrus,
My brain grows hollow with the agony,
And I hear echoes—save me !

Satyrus All is well.

(*To Pulcheria*) Empress, I come from John the Anchorite,
With full interpretation of a vision—

Pulcheria (*Doubtfully*) From John the Anchorite ?

Honorio And he replies—

Quick, this is torture.

Satyrus Oh, he thinks you marked
For some great future, says you are elect
Beyond all question, an elected bride,
A spouse and well-beloved.

Pulcheria (*Devoutly lifting her hands*) How wonderful !
My thought confirmed.

Satyrus But says you must be patient ;
Great destinies are worked out by degrees.

Honorio (*Examining Satyrus' hand*) It pleased him . . . ?

(*Enter a Chamberlain*)

Chamberlain Madam, the ambassadors
Are in the palace and most urgently
Beseech you for an audience.

Pulcheria (*To Honorio*) Beata,
I will return.

Honorio No, do not, for this vision
Is something you can never understand.

(*Exit Pulcheria and the Chamberlain*)

Where is the ring ?

Attila, My Attila!

Satyrus Not on his index-finger ;
You had not calculated how enormous
That is : his hands—

Honorio He could not put it on ?
He tried ? Was that the end ? What did he say
When you unfolded all I felt for him,
All the great future I will bring to pass ?

Satyrus He liked that, and he fumbled with the hoop
While I was talking, scrutinised its motto ;
And then he laughed—I never heard such laughter—
And said you were immodest.

Honorio (*As she recoils, with heaving breast*) While I
thought
There was a god within him that could answer
Love's sheer divineness back !

He did not surely
Laugh all the time ? They say he never laughs.

Satyrus His Huns were thunder-struck to hear the
sound :

But soon he had regained his gravity ;
And then he said by the interpreter
Your messages were frank and interesting.

Honorio Frank ! But that seems to wound me ; yet
you say

His interest was awakened, perhaps his wonder ;
For it must be a wondrous condescension
To him that I should offer him my ring.

Satyrus It is to me an infamy so great

Attila, My Attila !

I almost tore it from his hand.

Honorio Oh, why ?

Satyrus Because, Augusta, he is such a beast,
This son of Mudzuk, with his hateful eyes
That seem to lick the terror they inspire.
If you could only watch them !

Honorio He refused

To yield my ring ?

Satyrus Precisely : but he questioned—

Honorio Of what ?

Satyrus Your dowry.

Honorio Ah ! You said that half

The West belonged to me ?

Satyrus And then he lent,

The devil, on the black skins of his throne—

Honorio Musing ?

Satyrus His features did not work, and yet
It seemed as if some frenzy mastered him.

Honorio Oh, then it was he brooded on my love ;
He is half-savage, and these silences
Are needful for some brains to understand.
I like that silence, and can now forgive him
The laugh that hurt me, in my turn, laugh too.
So he is ugly, and his throne is black . . .
What are you thinking of to look so sad
Now I at last am happy ?

Satyrus You are safe,
Safe in your madness ; they will never venture

Attila, My Attila !

To hurt you by a hair, for Attila
Would sack half Italy in his revenge.

Honorio (Triumphantly) He would.

Satyrus But I am lost ; I shall not serve you
After to-day.

Honorio (Who has not listened) O Satyrus, do you
Think me immodest ?

Satyrus No, unusual,
Poor little girl, that's all. And Attila
Has never seen you, there is that excuse.
If he had looked into your eyes, such noble,
Believing eyes, he never could have laughed.

Honorio Thank you, dear Satyrus. Now if there's
danger,
The least, you must escape.

*(She pushes him away from her. Re-enter Pulcheria
and a train of mutes and chamberlains)*

Pulcheria Not by this door.
(To attendants) Arrest and bind him. And, Honorio, say,
What shall we do now with these awful names
You pierced me with ?

I would far rather keep them
Than see you branded with their infamy.
Speak, did you send your messenger with gold ?

(Honorio nods)

Then we are fellow-sinners.

Honorio Not at all.
I simply sent to him the golden ring

Attila, My Attila !

They give to lovers. And he wears it now.

Speak to me as the bride of Attila,

And do not touch my hands.

Pulcheria You doom the world

To fire and sword, if Attila should claim you—

Honorio But I am ready to start forth to-day ;

I have no fear of him. Give me some horses,

And, with a single servant, Satyrus,

I will go forth and meet my fate.

Pulcheria (In a stifled voice) Ravenna

Must be your doom—

(Honoria cowers an instant) or if . . . Child, I can
pardon,

If you would love me . . .

Honoria (Drawing herself up to her full height) Every
element

That can bring ruin fall upon the land,

On East and West alike. Imprison me,

Ah, even at Ravenna, if you will,

I have the empire in my grasp and doom it

Most freely to perdition. Fire and sword,

Famine and sickness, let them break on you !

I have his hand who is the scourge of God.

Traitor and hypocrite !

Pulcheria (Faintly) I cannot sentence.

(To attendants) Call in the Emperor. As for that
false slave,

Bear him to execution.

Attila, My Attila !

Honorio Satyrus ?

You shall not do it! On my knees, I pray—

(Re-enter Theodosius, Athenais, Arcadia, Marina, with the Ambassadors and Courtiers).

But here is Theodosius.

Pulcheria White with rage ;

Do not appeal to him.

Theodosius These envoys swear

That they have seen your eunuch in the tent.

Ambassadors We swear.

Honorio And you swear truth. But, Theodosius,
You said when I brought love into your life
I brought so great a boon that anything
I ever chose to ask for should be mine.

I ask the life of Satyrus. Unbind him !

Theodosius Put him to instant torture.

Honorio Athenais,

Plead for him !

Athenais But I cannot plead ; the man
Is taken in high treason.

Honorio (*Desperately clutching Pulcheria's hand*) If
you love me—

(A pause. Pulcheria remains speechless)

Theodosius Behead him quickly. I am ruler now,
Pulcheria, and dismiss your favourite
For ever from my court.

(Separating them) Unlock her hand,
It sold me to the devil !

Attila, My Attila !

*Honorio (Fixing her eyes on Satyrus, who is being
led away, and lifting her hands as if to draw a
curse down on them all) Attila,
My Attila, come to me and avenge !*

ACT IV

Attila, My Attila !

ACT IV

SCENE—*The private chapel of the royal palace at Ravenna. It is rich with mosaic-work and gold. A flight of steps leads up to the altar : two chairs of state are placed below the steps to the right.*

PLACIDIA, *now white-headed, sits on her throne; before her, at a little distance, stands* EUGENIUS.

Placidia You know, Eugenius, why I sent for you ?

Eugenius Empress, when they unloosed my chains, I stammered—

Did it mean pardon ; and they said in jest,
I know it must have been in mockery,
Something about Augusta and myself.

Placidia They did not jest ; I summoned you to wed
Augusta—no, the woman you betrayed :
I summon you to make my child a wife.

Eugenius (In blank amazement) And she—she wishes
this ?

Placidia She does not know.

Attila, My Attila !

Eugenius Then I refuse.

Placidia You cannot.

Eugenius I refuse.

And now I am beyond your threats ; my life
Is a loathed burthen—

Placidia Torture ?

Eugenius That is grown
Familiar, *that* I suffer every day :
It cannot now unnerve me.

Placidia Then it fails.

Eugenius What do you want ? Honoria—

Placidia Your old manners
At least ! You were her servant.

Eugenius That disgrace
Has been wiped out for ever. You may frown !
The girl I rave of in the moonlit nights,
Who comes with little, tripping feet, Augusta !
No, by my manhood, but Honoria, mine,
My love, my mistress !

Placidia And to be your wife.

Eugenius Never ! She loved me fourteen years
ago,

And I have gone on loving her. But she—
I know she has been loathing me, unless . . .

(*With sudden agony*)

Unless she has been wanton and again . . .
Empress, why did you summon me—to cloak
Some lover's insult ?

Attila, My Attila !

Placidia Yes, to be her shield
From utter infamy.

Eugenius Again—O God !
I will not shield her.

Placidia She has sent a ring
To Attila ; he took it, and demands
Her person and her dowry. We must either
By Christian marriage put her beyond reach
Of his unlawful claim, or give his lust
And avarice their victim.

Eugenius Madam, why
Am I raked up for this ?

Placidia How natural !
You who have once possessed her.

Eugenius Once ! How often
Have others ?

Placidia She has lived in strict seclusion
Since you were parted ; but this ring she sent
To Attila removes her from all hope
Of human sympathy and help, but yours.
Save her, if you repent.

Eugenius That I betrayed her,
Yes ; that I loved her, that she gave herself,
No, never ! But it seems her heart is set
On this disgusting Hun, a rival, Madam,
Less to your taste than I.

Placidia She has not seen him.

Eugenius Then it grows clear. This was a childish trick

Attila, My Attila !

Like that she played on me—a trothplight-ring
For any finger. After fourteen years,
So little changed !

Placidia You recognise the need ?
We must protect her by a formal rite.

Eugenius And have you thought what it will be to
me ?

I love her ; in your cursed mines I learnt
To love her as a man : I have won freedom,
Chipping your gold and swearing. Do not trust me
With any formal part.

Placidia I cannot save her :
I made her an Augusta in the hope
Of keeping her from misery ; she plunges
Into the vortex and she calls me hard.
Save her—you can.

(Coming up to him, she lays her hands clasped in supplication on his breast)

Eugenius I shall get little thanks
For this salvation.

Placidia When she sent the ring,
He said—it was reported through the camp—
That Roman women have no modesty.
How will he treat her, if we give her up ?

Eugenius You shall not give her up.
(VALENTINIAN enters)

Placidia Then take your place
Beside the altar till I summon her.

Attila, My Attila !

*(Placidia addresses one of the guard—then she and
Valentinian talk together)*

Eugenius (By the altar) Ho, ho ! And now we shall
clasp hands again ;

No man has clasped her hand. How I have cursed her,
In these hot mines and called on all the devils

To take her : but this devil, Attila . . .

*(HONORIA enters ; she is dressed simply in white as on
the morning of her birthday.)*

The same—except the faded hair, except . . .

No, I have lost the little girl who tripped

Down to me in the mines—lost her for ever !

(He covers his eyes)

Honoria (Speaking very low and with great sweetness)

Why have you sent for me ? I am contented,

Quite happy now, though I am in Ravenna,

And kept so strict a captive.

Eugenius Oh, her voice !

Honoria I live, though I am buried in the earth ;

A power has touched me that is like the sun,

And every little fibre of my body

Is beating with the spring. You cannot hurt me ;

I love the salt air from the marsh, I love

The deep seclusion.

Valentinian Then your country's groans
Have never reached you ?

Honoria I can hear no sound . . .

I know the surface of the earth itself

Attila, My Attila !

Is being moved by Attila ; I know
There are black ridges on the empire's verge.

Valentinian You do not know there has been one campaign

Already, that our kingdom is laid waste

By you . . .

Honorio (*A doubtful eagerness brightening her face*)

By me ?

Valentinian I tell you, in your name

Cities are burned, the harvest trampled down :

Vicenza and Verona, Bergamo,

Milan, all left as poor as villages—

Honorio (*Involuntarily*) *He* must have been in Italy !

Valentinian And women

You are not fit to touch through you were forced

Into the devilish arms for which you long.

Honorio He has been here !

Valentinian You flush !

Honorio And as my portion

Claims . . . Italy ?

Valentinian To strike you in the face !—

He claims half of my kingdom.

Honorio Yes—and ?

Valentinian You

To be his bride.

Honorio The bride of Attila !

(*Eugenius comes nearer*)

My ring has virtue, and my hope has virtue,

Attila, My Attila !

And my abounding faith in him—O joy !
I felt the dream I had to be so great
That he must act it. Bride of Attila !

Valentinian The Tanjou vows unless we give you up
In spring he will descend on Rome itself,
And burn the holy city. Give you up !
No, not if God or man can keep you ours.
Smile, like a vampire, do ! You will not win me
To tolerate your ghoul, with greedy hand
Halving my sceptre, rolling from his lips
Counter-commands to mine, and getting children,
With noses broad as tents, to take his place
Above the Roman world.

Honorio I never yet
Have needed to contend : I do not think
That words can settle anything. O mother,
Why do you care to keep me still in bonds,
When you are quite defeated ?

Placidia No, I am not.
I send for you to do my will as simply
As when I sent for you to take the crown
And title of Augusta. You are here
By Christian marriage to be made a wife ;
And by that bond I shall defeat your hope
Of ever being bride to Attila.

Honorio But nothing can prevent it.

Placidia Yes, God can—
The Church of God, its holy sacrament.

Attila, My Attila !

Honorio (*Laughing softly*) A sacrament can keep me
from him—try,

Oh, let it try !

Placidia Blaspheming girl, it can.
For you are to be married, to be joined
Securely to another, who will be
Your sole possessor.

Eugenius (*Between his teeth*) Yes, your sole.

Honorio Ha. . . married ? (*She laughs ringingly*)
To whom ?

Eugenius (*Coming to her with extended hands*) My
unforgotten, you forget.

To me, in name.

Honorio (*Blankly*) To you—
(*Recognising him*) To you ! The pity
That you should take a truth of long ago
And turn it into falsehood.

(*Keeping him back with a gesture of her hands*) You
are nothing,

No more to me than is my father's grave,
That does not sway a motion of my life.
Leave me !

Eugenius I cannot, till, my service done,
The servant is dismissed.

Honorio To play at marriage—
You who have been my lover !

Eugenius And betrayed you,
Have you forgotten that ? Through all the years

Attila, My Attila !

I never have forgotten it. You loved me
As women must not love, you dragged my heart
Through hell for you ; but not to see your face,
Though it is like the upper light to me,
Do I stand here.

You shall not be betrayed
Again—and by a man who could not suffer,
Who could not love you. . . . I, at least I love,
At least I suffer. I am here to save you
From even a viler traitor than myself.

Placidia By making you a wife.

Honorio Oh—anything !

Call me what names you will, *Eugenius' wife*,
Augusta : I have learnt what titles mean.
You cannot scare me with such shadows while
I see the Tanjou with a naked sabre
Flashing before him as he rushes forth
To make the lands his own. I am the bride
Of Attila whatever you may do,
And am secure against these forms and rites
Because the love that knitted up the world
Is with me—love, love, love !

Placidia O misery,
To hear one's child as she will rage in hell !

(She sinks on her throne).

Valentinian (Laying hold of Honorio) You serpent, I
will hold and never loose you
Till you are knotted fast. You do not care

Attila, My Attila !

Although you kill your mother.

Honorio Years ago

I think she would have killed me, if she could.

(Turning to Eugenius) She killed our child. Eugenius,
you consent

Now to obey her will ? I have no care

For anything they do to me : but you,

Can you be base again ?

Eugenius Give me your hand.

I do this for your sake and . . . damn your mother !

Honorio (Slowly) Then I forgive you. Oh, what cruelty
You deal yourself !

Eugenius My ring upon your hand,
I only wish to live to keep it there,
While the long, famishing and awful years
Number my exile.

Valentinian (Taking her by her shoulder) I am urgent
now.

Summon the priest.

Honorio No violence ! If you need
A victim for your altar, I am ready.
While you are jabbering prayers I shall appeal
To the great wizard God is sending forth
To overthrow you. I am with the storms,
Nature's own incantations, devilry
That heaven itself unlooses : I appeal
To the seven, deadly plagues, to flood and fire,
To the invisible, destroying hosts

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA
Attila, My Attila!

That lay whole empires prostrate east and west.
I do not plead my cause—I plead myself,
Forbidden my own nature : such a cry
Is shriller than the raven's.

*(She takes Eugenius' hand, and, laughing a low, wild
laugh, goes up to the altar. Placidia lifts her head
and sees Valentinian)*

Placidia How it echoes,
That laughter like a child's laugh, through the church.
O Valentinian, I shall soon be dead.

Valentinian I do not like her curses.

Placidia Go to her.

*(Valentinian ascends the steps with the priest and several
courtiers and women, among them Marsa. Placidia
sits rigid as stone)*

He thinks she cursed me. Can it be that children
Have any power to curse? I thought that parents
Alone could strike that mortal way. I thought—
(Faintly) Marsa.

*(Marsa comes from among the women and stoops over
Placidia)*

Marsa Yes, Empress, yes! But are you ill?

Placidia I suffer, that is all. Marsa, you said
Once that your daughter should be made a nun ;
But now, if I command, you will obey?

Marsa Empress, in everything.

Placidia But tell me first
Whether your girl desires to leave the world?

Attila, My Attila !

Marsa I cannot hope she does.

Placidia Then marry her

Where she is drawn to marry, and, while young,

Plant her in soil that brought you happiness.

Remember ! Fan me, Marsa !

(Pointing toward the altar, but not looking)

Is it done ?

God, if this marriage should be farce on farce,

And Attila possess her after all.

For he rejects our sanctions, he is bound

By nothing we are bound by. It is strange

I never thought of that, and I will never

Allow it can be thought of.

(She closes her eyes as if dead—then opens them suddenly)

An alarm !

How startling ! What can cause it ?

Marsa Shall I ask ? *(Advancing toward the door)*

It grows ; the guards no longer bar the way.

Empress, my husband !

(ANTHEMIUS, conducted by soldiers and courtiers, reaches Placidia's throne and falls at her feet)

Anthemius Attila is dead.

Placidia But . . . Are you sure of this ?

Anthemius The Hun is dead.

Placidia (Grasping the arms of her chair and rising)

Then I am not defeated. Sin is sin,

And God opposes fierce idolators.

Attila, My Attila !

My people, do you hear him ? Attila
Is dead.

All Deliverance ! Attila is dead !

(The whole chamber rings with the cry as Honoria turns her back on the priest and Eugenius, the marriage having been consummated. On hearing the news Eugenius raises his arms with a gesture of thanksgiving toward the altar. Honoria's face as she turns is rapt and glorified, but slowly fixes in horror)

Honoria It is a lie, a fearful piece of jesting
To follow such a marriage. Oh, I know
When there is truth in anything—I feel it,
And this is quite outside me. All you say
And do is lying.

(She advances), Attila is dead
As truly as Eugenius is my husband.
But this is acted bravely—nuptial games
To follow our espousals !

(She laughs) Shout again
Your frantic chorus *Attila is dead !*
See, I will lead you !

(She pauses on the top of the steps and looks round)

You are silent now,
You dare not speak that falsehood to my face ;
For Attila, you know, will never die—
That is the terror. I have summoned him
To break my bonds : he will destroy you all.

Attila, My Attila !

(Placidia gives a glance of doubt and anguish at Anthemius)

Who told this poor, weak, flimsy tale ?

Valentinian Ha, ha !

You do not recognise the messenger.

Honorio (Hurrying down the steps)

Who is it ? No . . . Anthemius, you have always
Been faithful and a friend to me. Speak truth,
While I can hear. You do not understand
How life itself grows hollow as you jest,
And leaves me undefended—

Anthemius I speak truth ;

I would not lie, a soldier's word !

Honorio Oh then

It is report ; often such mighty falsehoods
Grow up around the mighty—a report
With something in it, and you do not know
The Scythian tongue ; you misinterpreted.
He may have fallen sick, but is not dead,
For that would be mere chaos and collapse.

(Turning to Eugenius, who stands now on the top of the steps)

He has my ring—Eugenius, do you hear ?—
For troth-plight on his hand : I am his bride—
These are realities.

Anthemius (Desperately) I saw him dead
With my own eyes, Augusta.

Honorio Saw it . . . oh !

Attila, My Attila !

(*Reeling*) Where's Satyrus? . . .

(*She lifts her hands for help; Eugenius hastening down the steps tries to support her, but she rejects his help, and props herself against a column as if she were bound to it*)

Now tell me . . . all the rest.

Anthemius Dead in his tent, his warriors riding round

In eagle-rings, and further off the women
Raising their shrill lament.

Honorio (*With vague exultation*) A cry comes up
As from the bosom of the earth—farewell!
And they have lost their god: my Attila!

(*With glowing face, she spreads out her arms as if to receive a divinity; Eugenius sinks down on the lowest step of the altar*)

Valentinian How did he die? From gorging?

Anthemius He was murdered.

Valentinian Some rebel . . . ?

Anthemius No, his bride—

Valentinian How's that?

Eugenius (*Springing up*) His bride?

Honorio (*With a shriek*) His bride!

Anthemius The captive Ildico. I sat
At table with him:—horror, drunkenness,
And merriment of savages! I saw
His victim dragged on to the nuptial couch,
Piled high above the throne; and caught a glimpse

Attila, My Attila !

One instant of her curious, watchful face.
As the girl passed, a shudder followed her ;
Although the host of warriors roared and stamped
Acclaimingly, they knew she had been forced.

Honoria (*Her face rigid and threatening*)

Forced ! and while he was asking . . .

Placidia Do not publish

Your shame, for your own sake. You must be conscious
Of your mad folly now.

Anthemius Yes, every one

Knew that the girl was forced, but no one dreamed
That such a deed was trembling at her heart.

Honoria They did not . . . Oh, go on !

Anthemius And when next morning

He did not leave his tent, as was his custom,
The army laughed ; but as the daylight spread
One glitter on the plain, and still no sound
Broke through the folds, the jesting died away.
His warriors clashed their spears against their shields ;
He did not wake : they cried about the tent
Like wolves and jackals . . . but he did not wake.
At last they caught the tent-skirt in their hands
And entered one by one. The bride was seated,
White, with malicious and abandoned eyes,
Nursing a laugh, her veil wrung round her chin,
And Attila lay prostrate in a mass
Of frozen blood !

(*During all this while Honoria's face and attitude*

Attila, My Attila !

have become more terrible and fascinated. Pale, with blank eyes and a jeering laugh, she catches hold of her own veil and wrings it round her head, while her right hand is clenched as if it held a knife)

Honorio (*Sharply between her teeth*) Killed? Are you sure?

Anthemius (*Terrified*) Yes, murdered.

Honorio Not merely dead, but *murdered*? You are sure?

Anthemius By Ildico.

Honorio I never had a sister—

Ildico, Ildico! I have one now.

Ildico!

(She throws up her arms, shrieking the name, and falls a senseless heap on the ground. Eugenius stoops to lift her)

Placidia Do not touch her; I forbid.

She is no wife of yours except in name.

Return to exile.

(To the guard) Take her to her cell;

She must be hidden.

(A cry goes up on all sides without and within the palace,

ATTILA IS DEAD !)

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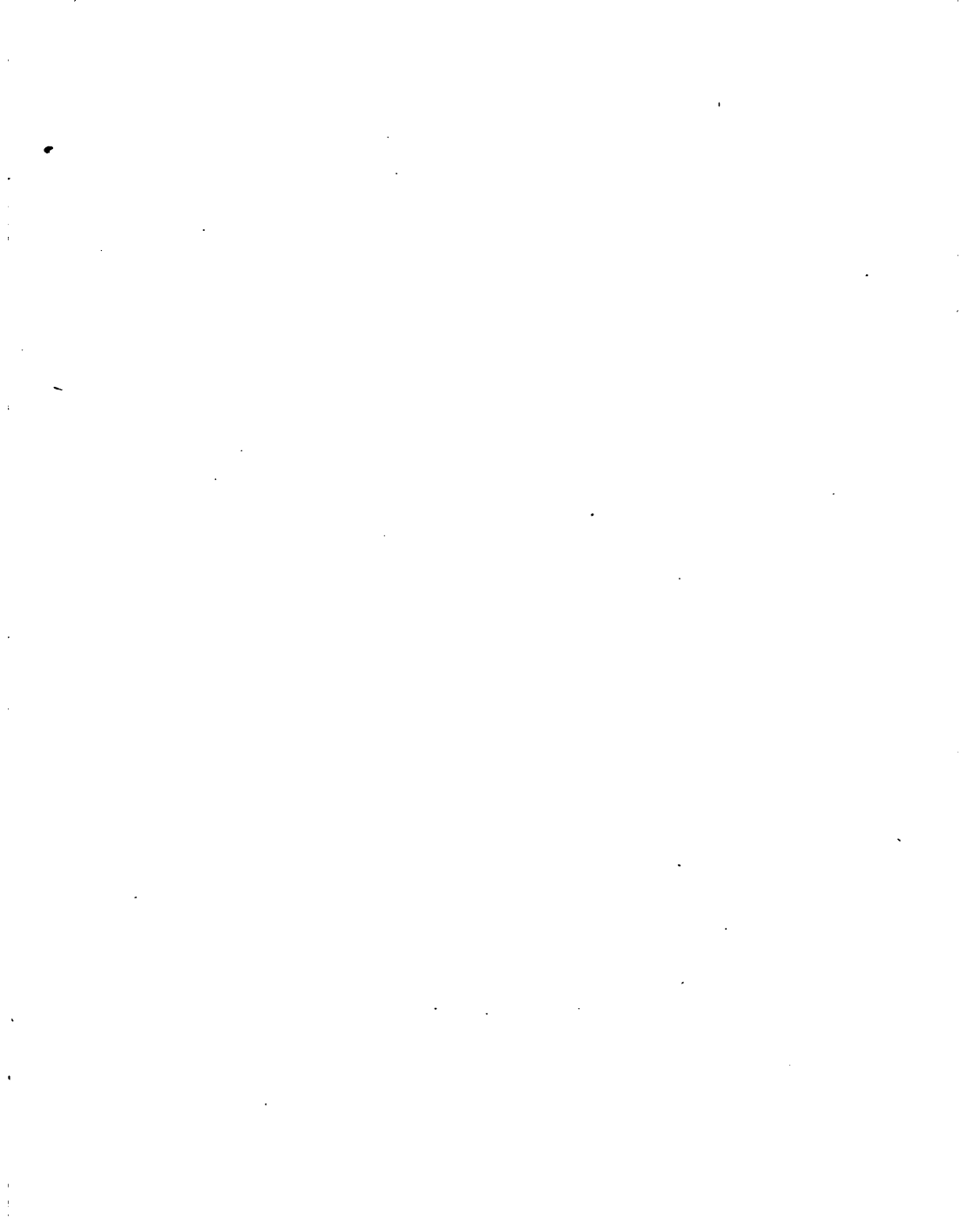
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